

Coal and Crude Oil Export Terminals: The Lesson of Kosmos, Washington



I reside in the historic railroading community of Centralia, Washington, where rich history, pillared mansions, and tree-lined streets combine to denote a place that matters to many. I've been following the debate over coal and crude oil export terminals with a keen interest, and offer the following perspective:

There once existed a small logging town named Kosmos, Washington. It was just east of Centralia, nestled in the foothills of the Cascade Mountains in Lewis County. In 1968, after many decades of debate, which included three trips to the U.S. Supreme Court, the waters of the Cowlitz River were finally allowed to rise over tiny Kosmos, as Riffe Lake took shape behind the newly completed Mossyrock Dam. Today, the dam supplies 40% of the clean hydro-electric power Tacoma Power customers and businesses rely on, vital flood control to the surrounding lowlands, recreational opportunities and stable family-wage jobs in numbers higher than ever inhabited Kosmos. Those re-located to make way for the dam were compensated for their sacrifice. Even with the now obvious cost-benefit, the decision to wipe tiny Kosmos off the map was not taken lightly. Indeed, it's a good case study in how difficult decision-making is approached in a modern democracy.

Recently, Washington State has been inundated by a plethora of coal and crude oil export schemes. These proposals include life-altering impacts to communities along the supply lines: businesses, fisheries, outdoor recreation, the natural environment. Health, safety and property values. All are impacted. Large swaths of our natural environment will face an uncertain future. Since industry is unwilling to study the most subtle and long-term impacts to communities and your health, they remain less clear.

The sheer scale of these proposals is giving even the most ardent of railroading towns great pause. If just the Washington State terminal proposals are built, the proposed daily schedule of coal and crude oil export traffic could include:

- 6 mile and a half-long crude oil tanker trains destined for yet-to-be built super-tanker terminals in Grays Harbor County.
- 14 mile and a half-long crude oil trains running North and South to Puget Sound terminals and refineries.
- 18 mile and a half-long coal trains heading for the Cherry Point Terminal in Bellingham.
- A similar number headed for the Millennium coal terminal in Longview.
- 20 additional mile and a half-long coal trains bound for British Columbia.
- Any number trains carrying Canadian coal and crude oil bound for ports beyond Washington State, but nonetheless passing through impacting Washingtonians.

Many of Washington's great cities will suffer direct and immediate impacts; a list that includes: Blaine, Burlington, Camas, Centralia, Chehalis, Cheney, Edmonds, Kent, Marysville, Monroe, Mt. Vernon,

Puyallup, Seattle, Sedro-Woolley, Spokane, Sumner, Washougal and Winlock. A rundown of the “benefits” we’d be welcoming into our communities includes:

- Blocked intersections hobbling commerce and emergency response;
- Clogged rail lines resulting in higher costs to export products made in Washington. Agriculture, value-added and high tech products. Washington State’s ability to compete globally will be damaged.
- Upwards of 50,000 fishing industry jobs will be placed at risk; as will employment in pass-through communities, recreational and commercial opportunities.
- Reduction in property values for those owning property anywhere near railroads.
- Federal Taxpayers being forced, really insulted, to pay an average of 95% of necessary rail corridor improvements, safety mitigation and crossing projects.
- Premature deterioration of expensive infrastructure due to persistent coal dust corrosion.
- Health impacts from exposing populations, especially the young and elderly, to persistently high levels of benzene, hydrogen sulfide, mercury, and other known or suspected health hazards.

For our sacrifice, they get 50-100 permanent jobs per terminal? “Front groups” for big oil will tell you unfinished crude oil exports are currently banned by federal law, and won’t be exported. Don’t believe it for a moment. Industry journals talk openly about cashing in on the dirty energy demand surge in China and India. What they will fail to mention: 1. Canadian crude oil falls outside of this ban and may flow without limit through Washington. 2. The crude oil export ban is so full of loopholes, it is gradually being rendered useless. 3. The international energy lobby is openly and aggressively advocating elimination of this ban, using item 2. as their justification. It’s an export play, pure and simple.

Then there is coal. It’s gone through a sophisticated re-branding and we’re now told it’s ‘clean’. You may have heard the ads on public radio or TV. The problem is, as well-known liberal magazine, ***Popular Mechanics***, points out: “Coal will never be clean, *and is* still bad news for the environment and human health.” Finally, when you study the fine print, as a group of North Puget Sound cities recently did, you will find these export schemes don’t cap the size of future export operations. It’s really anyone’s guess what grand plans they’re hiding from us.

Unlike demonstrated benefits of the Mossyrock Dam, Washington State receives worse than nothing from the prospect of these terminals. Unless you’re a lunch joint next door, detail cars or sell asthma drugs for a living, you probably won’t see a benefit. No net gain in jobs, energy creation or benefit to local businesses. In fact, a recent study released by the largest city in our region demonstrate observable negative impacts outstripping industry-claimed benefits by a factor of 10 to 1. If it were not for the undisclosed millions being spent by these “front-groups”, there is a certain bizarre reality we would consider for even a moment sacrificing so much of Washington’s unique beauty.

Proponents are rolling out a sophisticated public relations offensive promising jobs and environmental protection. Please take their message with a grain of salt. Realize it was crafted by a skilled advertising agency to manipulate you into believing there may be some benefit to welcoming massive amounts of this toxic cargo into our communities and onto our water ways. As we saw in the terrible tragedy in Quebec over the summer, there is no benefit. Their single goal is to ease your conscience into ignoring

the widespread damage these proposals will inflict, hoping as a result you will sit on the sidelines of this important debate.

The way I see it, almost 50 years ago ample supplies of clean hydro-electric power and family wage jobs were made possible by the sacrifice of tiny Kosmos. In contrast, these coal and crude oil export terminals offer a massive regression in human progress. Robert Kennedy famously cautioned us not to excuse those willing to build their lives on the shattered dreams of others. When it comes to proposed coal and crude oil export terminals, we shouldn't. Too much is at stake. Fortunately, there is still time to register your opinion, tell your story or tell the story of someone you care about. The comment period for the Longview coal export terminal is open until November 18, 2013. It's encouraging to see 55,000+ written comments have already been received. Be part of our modern democracy and register your feelings at: www.millenniumbulkeiswa.gov

Sincerely,

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